



Department of
Local Government, Sport
and Cultural Industries

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Making sport safe

– junior sport policy



This booklet is part of a series covering the nine guidelines outlined in the Junior Sport Framework (JSF) as developed by the Australian Sports Commission (ASC).

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The guidelines cover topics to address the needs of young people in sport and include:

1. Long-term involvement
2. Physical growth and maturation
3. Sport pathways
4. Forming links
5. People making it happen
6. Quality coaching
7. Making sport safe
8. The law and sport.

These booklets outline the main points of the guidelines to assist in the delivery of best practice in junior sport and to encourage young people to make a life-long commitment to sport.

A complete copy of the JSF is available on the ASC website: www.ausport.gov.au

Making sport safe

Sport providers have a legal duty of care (see Sport and Recreation (WA)'s The law and sport) to protect the welfare of young people and ensure they are not exposed to unnecessary risk in any aspect of sports delivery.

This is best achieved through continually updating knowledge and skills for providing a safe and healthy environment.

Safety concerns for which advice, training and procedures (written where possible) should be in place include:

- Facilities and equipment
- The environment (e.g. weather)
- The conduct of training and competition to prevent injury, illness, negative psychological effects and burnout
- Infectious diseases
- Medical conditions
- Drugs (e.g. alcohol, tobacco, supplements)
- Weight control
- Dealing with emergencies.

Note: the list of issues dealt with in this booklet is not exhaustive. Sporting clubs must do their own risk assessment to make sure they have covered all welfare-related issues (see Sport and Recreation (WA)'s Risky business for further information.)

Facilities and equipment

Risk management procedures must be used to identify and control any risk of injury or illness related to the playing environment and associated infrastructure. Many sport providers utilise facilities provided by local government and these local governments would most likely have completed a risk management plan. The plan will identify any risks and who is responsible for managing these risks.

Club facilities such as canteen areas and areas for social activities must be included in any risk assessment.

Facilities, sporting equipment and protective equipment should meet the standard requirements for safety of the particular sport.

The dimensions of playing areas and equipment must be suitable for the participants' size and physical ability so that young people:

- Experience fun and success
- Are less likely to be injured.

Please refer to Sport and Recreation (WA)'s Sports Dimensions Guide and the Sports State Sports Association (SSA) for assistance in this area.

Protective equipment is also important in injury prevention. Items such as helmets, pads and mouth guards should be properly fitted, worn at all times and regularly maintained. Refer to your SSA for guidance on appropriate equipment to use.

Strategies for facilities and equipment

- Maintain facilities (e.g. field, change rooms, pool) according to required standards
- Inspect venues for hazards and correct these prior to all training and competition
- Use equipment suitable for the activities and the participants' size and development. Consult your SSA regarding suitable equipment size
- Use protective equipment for training and competition (e.g. helmets, pads, mouth guards)
- Use equipment in accordance with the manufacturers' instructions
- Maintain equipment and replace when inadequate for doing its job
- Enforce the rules regarding the appropriate use of equipment to ensure the whole club provides a good example.

The environment

In managing risk, consideration must be given to environmental factors and their impact on participants.

Weather conditions

Sometimes extreme weather conditions (e.g. heat, cold, rain or wind) make it best to postpone training and/or competition.

Different regions of Australia vary in the weather conditions they consider extreme, due to their acclimatisation to the local environment.

Consult your SSA regarding extreme weather policies.

Fluid balance

Fluid balance is important at any time but needs more attention in some weather conditions. Young people do not instinctively drink enough to replace fluid lost during activity.

Young people must be reminded to drink before, during and after training and competition.

In adverse weather conditions follow specific fluid practices according to Sports Medicine Australia's most current guidelines.

Sun protection

Young people need to protect themselves from sun exposure by wearing sensible clothing, broad-brimmed hats and applying sunscreen.

Sporting clubs should help young people take these precautions and assist in other ways to care for young people (e.g. erect artificial shades).

Strategies for the environment

- Obtain information from your SSA and/or SMAWA regarding the issues concerning playing sport in extreme conditions
- Identify club members that have first aid or other medical qualifications that are involved in the delivery of club activities
- Subsidise the cost of club members being trained as Sports Trainers (Level 1) where there is an interest
- Have written procedures available on the Club Website and distribute via club communication channels regarding:
 - what to do in adverse weather
 - sun protection
 - maintaining fluid balance.
- Have water available for fluid replacement
- Make sure young people protect themselves against sun exposure, provide sunscreen at all activities and a hat as part of the team uniform if appropriate
- Enlist the help of parents/carers to send their children ready for safe sport (e.g. mouth guards, hats, water bottles).

Training and competition

Training and competition are generally beneficial for the development of young people in sport. However, their health and wellbeing can be adversely affected.

The coach has an important role in preventing negative outcomes such as injury and illness through careful planning, conduct and evaluation of programs.

Setting an appropriate intensity level for training and competition is important.

Over-training and over-competing can result in serious outcomes such as injury, illness, negative psychological effects and burnout (see 'Physical growth and maturation').

Causes include the following:

- High physical workloads with insufficient recovery
- Rapid increases in training frequency, intensity and duration

- Inconsistent training loads
- Competing too frequently
- Too much repetitive practice
- Emotional abuse/bullying
- No breaks between seasons.

Prevention requires planning a training schedule that controls the amount of stress placed on the young person by:

- Gradually increasing training loads
- Planning adequate recovery and variety
- Carefully monitoring the effect of training
- Reducing workloads when warning signs emerge.

Young people must be carefully monitored because in comparison to adults, they do not have:

- Good sensitivity to warning signs and symptoms (e.g. fatigue, muscle soreness, headaches, mood changes)
- The opportunity or skills to interact with the people who could alter their training and recovery program (e.g. coaches, sports science and medicine specialists).

Monitoring to prevent negative outcomes requires an individual, sport-specific approach.

In general, the younger and less experienced the young person:

- The less intense, less frequent and shorter the duration of training/practice and competition
- The more rest time is required within and between sessions.

Other issues affecting young people when training and competing include:

- Returning to sport after absences (e.g. injury, illness or extended holiday)
- Risks related to helping with setting and packing up
- Travel concerns (e.g. comprehensive insurance, member protection, appropriate drivers)
- Staying away from home.

Strategies for training and competition

- Prepare young people for their sport through quality, safe training methods with a focus on fun and enjoyment.
- Educate sport providers on safe training practices. The best way to do this is ensuring that all coaches have appropriate Accreditation and that some personnel are qualified as Sports Trainers.
- Set guidelines for workloads in accordance with the principles of training (i.e. progression, overload, specificity, variation, individual differences, adaptation, reversibility). The sports SSA may be able to provide information and resources in these areas.
- Identify club members that have qualifications in sports science, medicine and/or personal training. They may be willing to contribute to the planning and delivery of programs.
- Actively discourage unsafe practices (e.g. training camps with significantly increased workloads, lack of warm up and cool down).

Infectious diseases

The risk of contracting illness increases under some sports conditions.

The risk of infection increases when young people:

- Live and train in close contact with others increasing cross-infection
- Train in environments where germs breed (e.g. changerooms)
- Share contaminated items (e.g. drink bottles)
- Are exposed to new environments when travelling to compete
- Damage the skin allowing transfer of germs
- Come in contact with other people's blood.

Strategies for infectious diseases

- Reduce risk of infection by warning young people not to share personal items (such as drink bottles and towels)
- Adopt sport specific rules for dealing with incidents involving blood
- Ensure all facilities used (changerooms, toilets, showers) are kept clean through planned and regular cleaning regimes.

Medical conditions

Some young people have chronic medical conditions which affect their participation in sport. Particular care needs to be taken in the case of long-term conditions such as:

- Asthma
- Diabetes
- Epilepsy
- Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Clubs must be aware of each child's specific needs and know how to prevent and deal with problems.

Strategies for medical conditions

- Require young people, with their parents/guardians, to complete a pre-involvement questionnaire about their disabilities, medical conditions and specific needs, and circulate to those working with the young person
- Provide first aid training to club representatives or ensure there are adequate people within the club who hold current first aid qualifications
- Encourage coaches to include and plan for young people with special needs
- Provide updated information to sport providers on practices related to medical conditions such as asthma.

Drugs

Social drugs such as alcohol, tobacco and cannabis are commonly available in social settings and sometimes within the club environment.

Their use should be banned at any activity connected with sport, and young people should be encouraged to carry this through to their personal life.

Note: performance enhancing drugs are covered in Sport and Recreation (WA)'s, The law and sport guide.

Strategies for preventing drug use

- Provide education for young people so they understand that drugs can harm performance and their health
- Ban smoking at your club and especially around junior training or competition.

Weight control

Positive messages must be provided to young people about healthy eating as an aid to performing well. Act promptly if you notice a young person loses a significant amount of weight.

Strategies for weight control

- Provide young people with education on healthy practices for weight control
- Discourage young people from using laxatives and diuretics to reduce weight for weigh-ins
- Seek expert assistance when concerns arise.

Dealing with emergencies

- Planning what to do when an emergency occurs is an essential part of risk management. Sporting clubs need to develop and publish clear and easy to understand procedures
- Sporting clubs should have members with current first aid qualifications and request a parent/carer seeks a medical opinion when they are unsure about a child's health
- When medical advice cannot be obtained, the club should not allow the young person to participate
- A first aid kit must be available at training and competition venues
- Emergencies should be formally reported, discussed and changes made to procedures if needed.

Strategies for dealing with emergencies

- Have records available with details on how to contact parents/carers of young people
- Provide written procedures for medical emergencies
- Provide first aid training for club members
- Provide first aid kit and rescue equipment suitable for the sport
- Follow up emergencies and change procedures if needed.

Key message

Best practice by sporting clubs means minimising risk to young people. This requires:

- Providing training for sports providers working with young people
- Establishing and monitoring risk management procedures
- Ensuring agencies like Sports Medicine Australia and the Sport and Recreation (WA) resources are accessed and used in all planning.

The goal is to make everyone involved with junior sport safety conscious.

Websites

- Sports Medicine Australia: www.sma.org.au
- Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries (DLGSC) - Sport and Recreation (WA): <http://www.dsr.wa.gov.au/sportsdimensions>

Other resources

This resource is part of a series which provides assistance to Western Australian sport and recreation clubs and organisations to become better managed, more sustainable and to provide good quality services to members and participants.

Other resources in the series include:

1. Starting a new club
2. Planning for your club – the future is in your hands
3. Taking the lead! A guide for club presidents
4. The club secretary – the key to efficiency
5. Show me the money – a guide for the club treasurer
6. Effective club meetings – a guide for the chairperson
7. Making meetings effective – a short guide
8. Delegation – help for the overworked committee member
9. Problem solving – a guide for clubs
10. Promoting your club
11. Seeking and servicing a sponsor
12. Establishing your club rules
13. Risky business – a club guide to risk management
14. Clubs' guide to volunteer management
15. Member protection for clubs
16. How to be an inclusive club
17. Passport into schools – linking sports with schools
18. Youth sport – junior sport policy
19. Long-term involvement – junior sport policy
20. Physical growth and maturation – junior sport policy
21. Sport pathways – junior sport policy
22. Forming links – junior sport policy
23. People making it happen – junior sport policy
24. Quality coaching – junior sport policy
25. Making sport safe – junior sport policy
26. The law and sport – junior sport policy
27. Top 20 tips for officials
28. Top 20 tips for successful coaching

You will find the full series of the booklets on Sport and Recreation (WA)'s website:

www.dsr.wa.gov.au/clubs